

Hebrews 12.1-3

Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus

Christ Church Selly Park

Sunday 11 September 2022

After the death of the Sovereign

The great cloud

Our second reading dives right into the middle of a letter – you can tell because the first word is **therefore** (1). The writer had just listed a whole load of people from the Bible who had shown what it means to live by faith.

Noah **built an ark to save his family** (11.7), Moses led the people **through the Red Sea** (11.29) – amazing stuff! – but others **faced imprisonment** (11.36), and some were even **put to death** (11.37).

That means: living by faith is not the same as being successful, or talented, or wealthy. These people showed that living by faith means trusting God no matter what happens, it means not giving up even when it's hard to be a follower of Jesus.

Who are the people who've inspired or helped you in your faith? You don't have to shout out their names – but think of them.

And remember to say thank-you to God for them. Today we are specially saying thank-you to God for Her Majesty the Queen. But we all have our own **great cloud of witnesses** (1), people who've helped and supported and inspired and encouraged us in our faith – so let's make sure we say thank you to God for them.

Let us run

I didn't know Her Majesty, so I have no idea how she felt about her role. She had tremendous privilege: one of the richest people in the country, lived in palaces, had countless staff waiting on her. But her family's troubles were splashed all over the tabloids, she worked every single day except Christmas and Easter – and much as I love being your vicar, I *really* hope I'm not still when I'm 96.

What I do know is it wasn't easy for her to be a Christian. How do I know that? Because it isn't easy for *anyone* to be a Christian. That's why we need each other.

The writer says: **let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus** (1-2). Last week I said the Christian life is a long walk – today it's a gruelling race. The point is the same: it's hard, and we can only keep going if we support one another, if we run the race *together*.

See how the writer says **let us run, the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus**. It's simply not possible to be a Christian by ourselves. If we try we will **grow weary**, we will **lose heart** (3), and we won't finish the race. So let's keep going – together.

Consider him

While it's helpful to have examples of people who have lived by faith and not given up – people like Her Majesty – what's most important is that we lift our eyes up, and fix **our eyes on Jesus** (2) – **consider him** (3) the writer says.

The **cloud of witnesses** is ordinary people who lived by faith. But the purpose of a witness is not who *they* are but what they've seen, who they point to. In courtroom dramas on TV there's often a moment when the prosecuting lawyer says, 'And is that person in this room?' and the witness dramatically points to the accused.

Jesus is not the accused – but he *is* the one the **cloud of witnesses** points to. They all say, 'Don't look at me, **consider him...**'

Jesus knows what it's like for us when we struggle and find things difficult. He suffered terribly, and **endured the cross** (2). On it he died in our place, defeated death, won forgiveness and life for us. And now he sits **at the right hand of the throne of God** (2).

That means Jesus is not only **the pioneer and perfecter of faith** (2), who won through despite all his sufferings – he is also at God’s side, praying for us, cheering us on, calling us home.

If you feel unsettled at what’s happening in our country and the wider world, if you feel sad, lost, restless – you are not alone. This world is all shifting sand and moving goalposts. The only solid ground, the only rock on which we can stand firm, is **Jesus Christ** – who is **the same yesterday and today and forever** (13.8).

That’s why those witnesses point not to themselves, but to him.

Fix your eyes on Jesus

The TV and newspapers are full of Her Majesty’s long duty and service to her country – and rightly so. I give thanks for that, but even more I give thanks to God that she bore witness to *her* King, to the one who is King of all the queens and kings on earth, to the one whose reign will *never* end: Jesus.

Friends, please listen to the **great cloud of witnesses**: keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. Keep going together. Give thanks for those who’ve gone before. Look forward to the **joy set before** us. Fix your eyes on Jesus who is calling us home.